

REMARKS

This application has been carefully reviewed in response to the final Office Action dated February 5, 2008. Claims 1 to 66 are pending in the application, of which Claims 1, 6, 15, 17, 29 to 31, 36, 45, 47 and 59 to 66 are independent. Reconsideration and further examination are respectfully requested.

Claims 1 to 5, 6 to 28, 31 to 35, 45, 46 and 61 to 66 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph. In particular, the Office Action alleges that (1) in Claims 1, 15, 17, 31, 45 and 61 to 66, the phrases “means for receiving an approval service” and “means for storing the approval service” are vague, (2) Claims 3 and 4 are vague, (3) Claim 5 is vague, (4) Claims 1, 6, 17, 29, 30, 31, 36, 47, 59 to 62 and 64 to 66 recite the limitation “the result” for which there is insufficient antecedent basis, and (5) in Claims 15, 45 and 63, the phrase “transmission means for searching”, as well as lines 5 to 7, are vague. Regarding points (1) and (3) to (5), without conceding the correctness of the rejections, the claims have been amended taking into consideration each of the points raised by the Office Action.

Regarding point (2), according to the Office Action, the claims do not show how the “corresponding” works or is carried out in relation to the “decision condition” of Claim 1. However, Applicants respectfully submit that these issues relate to the scope of the claims rather than to clarity. As set forth at MPEP § 2173.04, the breadth of a claim is not to be equated with indefiniteness.

Therefore, reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejections under 35 U.S.C. § 112 are respectfully requested.

Claims 1 to 5, 31 to 35 and 61 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) over U.S. Patent No. 5,754,857 (Gadol), and Claims 6 to 30, 36 to 60 and 62 to 66 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) over Gadol in view of eFlow article (March 2000). The rejections are respectfully traversed and the Examiner is requested to reconsider and withdraw the rejections in light of the following comments.

The present invention is directed to an information processing apparatus in which a first user of an approval service provider sets a decision condition for an approval service object and causes the information processing apparatus to store the approval service object including the set decision condition. Then, when the user of the information processing apparatus makes an approval request, the information processing apparatus does not make a request directly to the user of the approval service provider; rather, the information processing apparatus causes decision means to decide whether to approve the request using the stored approval service object. As a result, the information processing apparatus can execute an approval process even when the user of the approval service provider is busy or unavailable.

Referring specifically to claim language, independent Claim 1 is directed to an information processing apparatus. The apparatus includes receiving means for receiving an approval service object which includes a decision condition set by a user of an approval service provider, storage means for storing the approval service object received by the receiving means, approval request preparing means for preparing an approval request based on values entered by a user of the information processing apparatus, decision means for deciding whether or not to approve the prepared approval request, based on the

stored approval service object, and output means for outputting a result of the decision of the decision means.

Claims 31 and 61 are directed to a method and a computer program, respectively, substantially in accordance with the apparatus of Claim 1.

Independent Claim 6 is directed to an approval system. The approval system includes a service server for managing plural approval service objects registered by an approval service provider and a client terminal having approval request preparing means for preparing an approval request based on values entered by a user of the client terminal. The client terminal further includes acquisition means for searching for and acquiring an approval service object matching the approval request, among the plural approval service objects registered in the service server, wherein the approval service object includes a decision condition set by a user of the approval service provider. The client terminal also includes decision performing means for performing the approval decision for the approval request based on the acquired approval service object, and output means for outputting a result of the decision of the decision performing means.

Claims 36 and 62 are directed to a method and a computer program, respectively, substantially in accordance with the system of Claim 6.

Independent Claim 15 is directed to a service server. The service server includes approval service storage means for storing plural approval service objects instructed for registration by an approval service provider, wherein each of the approval service objects includes a decision condition set by a user of the approval service provider. The service server also includes search and transmission means for searching for an

approval service object which matches an approval request based on a search instruction received from an external apparatus, and transmitting the approval service object located by the search to the external apparatus. The external apparatus decides whether or not to approve the approval request based on the transmitted approval service object. The approval request is prepared based on values entered by a user.

Claims 45 and 63 are directed to a method and a computer program, respectively, substantially in accordance with the server of Claim 15.

Independent Claim 17 is directed to an approval system including a service server, a client terminal and a request server. The service server manages plural approval service objects registered by an approval service provider, wherein each of the approval service objects includes a decision condition set by a user of an approval service provider. The client terminal includes approval request preparing means for preparing an approval request based on values entered by a user of the client terminal. The request server includes approval request storage means for storing the approval request prepared in the client terminal, acquisition means for searching for and acquiring an approval service object matching the approval request stored in the approval request storage means, among the plural approval service objects registered in the service server, decision performing means for performing the approval decision for the approval request, based on the acquired approval service object, and output means for outputting a result of the decision of the decision performing means.

Claims 47 and 64 are directed to a method and a computer program, respectively, substantially in accordance with the system of Claim 17.

Independent Claim 29 is directed to an approval system including a service server and a client terminal. The service server manages plural approval service objects registered by an approval service provider, and each of the approval service objects includes a decision condition set by a user of an approval service provider. The client terminal includes approval request preparing means for preparing an approval request based on values entered by a user of the client terminal, search means for searching for an approval service object matching the approval request, among the plural approval service objects registered in the service server, transmission means for transmitting the approval request to the service server, in the case that the approval service object is located by the search means, and reception means for receiving the result of approval decision for the approval request transmitted from the service server. The service server includes decision performing means for performing the approval decision for the approval request transmitted from the client terminal, based on the approval service object matching the approval request, and transmission means for transmitting a result of the approval decision to the client terminal.

Claims 59 and 65 are directed to a method and a computer program, respectively, substantially in accordance with the system of Claim 29.

Independent Claim 30 is directed to an approval system including a service server, a client terminal and a request server. The service server manages plural approval service objects registered by an approval service provider, and each of the approval service objects includes a decision condition set by a user of an approval service provider. The client terminal includes approval request preparing means for preparing an approval

request based on values entered by a user of the client terminal. The request server includes approval request storage means for storing the approval request prepared in the client terminal. The request server further includes approval request storage means for storing the approval request prepared in the client terminal, search means for searching for an approval service object matching the approval request stored in the approval request storage means, among the plural approval service objects registered in the service server, transmission means for transmitting the approval service object to the service server, in the case that the approval service object is located by the search means, and reception means for receiving the result of approval decision for the approval request from the service server. The service server includes decision performing means for performing the approval decision for the approval request transmitted from the request server, based on the approval service object matching the approval request, and transmission means for transmitting a result of the approval decision to the request server.

Claims 60 and 66 are directed to a method and a computer program, respectively, substantially in accordance with the system of Claim 30.

The applied art, alone or in any permissible combination, is not seen to disclose or to suggest the features of the present invention, and in particular, is not seen to disclose or to suggest at least the features of (i) an approval service object which includes a decision condition set by a user of an approval service provider, and (ii) deciding whether or not to approve a prepared approval request, based on the approval service object.

As understood by Applicants, Gadol is directed to a system and method for automating a workflow by distributing tasks required for execution of the workflow over

servers and clients connected on a network. Once a workflow initiated by a user has been initiated by a database server, stages of the workflow can be executed on respective network clients without further interaction with the server by using a workflow courier. After each stage is executed, the client executing that stage updates the workflow courier and transmits the updated workflow courier to a client having an associated user who is authorized to perform a next step in the workflow. (See Gadol, Abstract).

Page 6 of the Office Action asserts that Gadol (Figure 3 and Column 1, lines 25 to 65, Column 2, lines 55 to 65, and Column 11, lines 56 to 60) discloses a decision step of deciding whether or not to approve a prepared approval request, based on a stored approval service.

The cited portions of Gadol are merely seen to disclose an automated workflow. In this workflow, an individual uses a client workstation connected to a server to initiate a workflow request form. The server then initiates a workflow application and returns a form to the client for the individual to fill out. The individual sends the completed form back to the server, the server stores information taken from the form, and creates another form using the stored information (e.g., an approval form for a request) and sends the form to an actor who is authorized to perform a next stage of the workflow (e.g., approval of the request). (See Gadol, Column 1, lines 25 to 65).

Furthermore, the cited portions of Gadol are seen to disclose an improved workflow automation system for the above-described workflow. The workflow automation system does not require pre-installation of all required software for executing the workflow on every network node of the workflow, and in which workflow automation

tasks are distributed across the network nodes, rather than being centralized in a server. (See Gadol, Column 2, lines 55 to 65). Additionally, a workflow expert determines whether each stage of the workflow was completed correctly before proceeding to the next stage. (See Gadol, Column 11, lines 56 to 60) Thus, by applying the improved workflow automation system to the original workflow, the individual would be able to fill out a request form and send the request form to the next actor authorized to perform the next stage without going through a central server. However, the next actor or user is still requested to make an approval of the request form. In contrast, in the present invention, a user is not requested to make an approval; rather, an information processing apparatus decides whether or not to approve a prepared approval request, based on an approval service object which includes a decision condition set by a user of an approval service provider.

The eFlow article is not seen to remedy the above-noted deficiencies of Gadol. The eFlow article is merely seen to disclose a platform that supports specification, deployment, and management of composite e-services. However, the eFlow article is not seen to add anything that, when combined with Gadol would have resulted in at least the features of (i) an approval service object which includes a decision condition set by a user of an approval service provider, and (ii) deciding whether or not to approve a prepared approval request, based on the approval service object.

Therefore, Claims 1, 6, 15, 17, 29 to 31, 36, 45, 47, and 59 to 66 are believed to be in condition for allowance, and such action is respectfully requested.

The other claims in the application are each dependent from the independent claims discussed above and are therefore believed to be allowable over the applied references for at least the same reasons. Because each dependent claim is deemed to define an additional aspect of the invention, however, the individual consideration of each on its own merits is respectfully requested.

Turning to a formal matter, Applicants respectfully request that the next Office communication include an initialed Form PTO-1449 indicating that the documents cited in the Information Disclosure Statement dated May 2, 2002 have been considered. This is a third request.

No other matters being raised, the entire application is believed to be in condition for allowance, and such action is courteously solicited.

Applicants' undersigned attorney may be reached in our Costa Mesa, California office at (714) 540-8700. All correspondence should continue to be directed to our below-listed address.

Respectfully submitted,

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